

La Vigna

EXTRA

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Since the article below did not make the deadline for our last issue and the information in it would no longer be pertinent by the time of our next publication, we are bringing you a special "EXTRA" issue of *La Vigna*.

SPECIAL TO LAVIGNA

by Angelojohn Chianese

"Quantum Leap." That term has always intrigued me. First time I heard it, I imagined shifts of reality on an immense scale. Lately my reading seems to imply these "leaps" or "shifts" happen on microminiature levels, not readily perceivable but transforming all phenomena which follow.

Item: Me, a year ago, mired in despair.

Versus: Me, now—full of possibility

Item: Me, 18 months ago, beginning the long process of self and other-alienation.

Versus: Me, now, engaged and connected with family and friends, old and new.

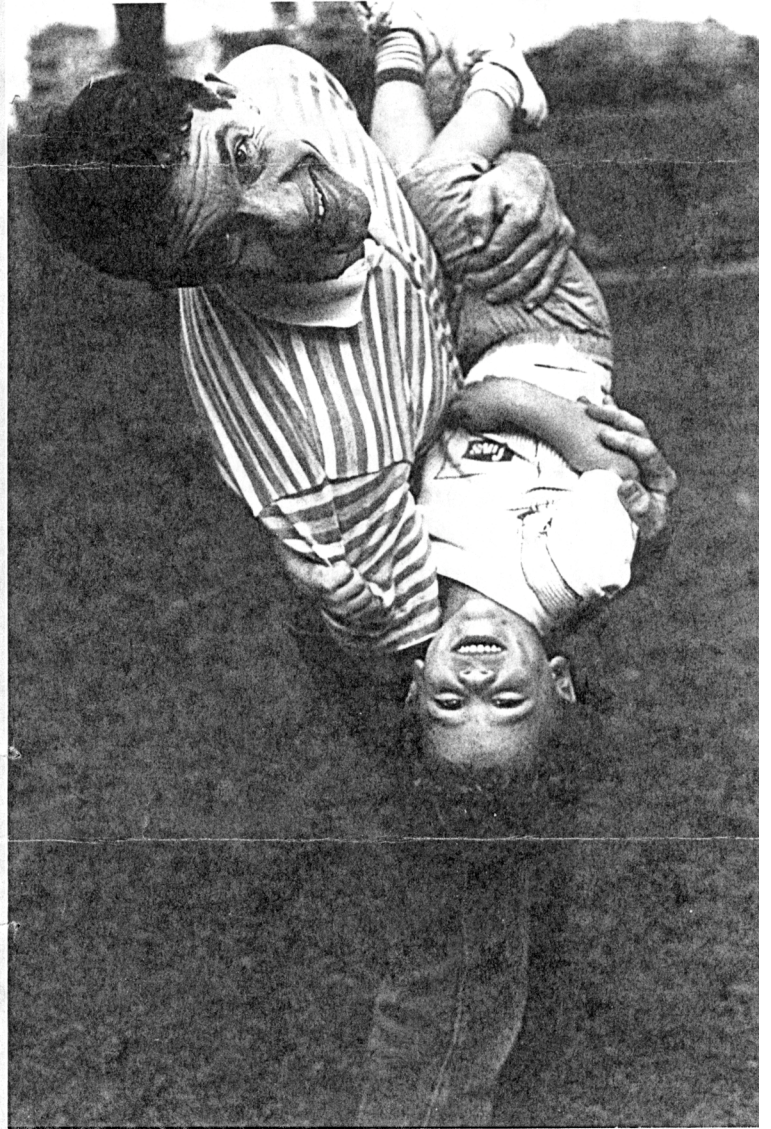
Item: Me, end of summer 94—stuck, desperate and going nowhere fast.

Versus: Me, now—free, hopeful and going to Italy next spring!

Which brings me to the main subject of this piece: Italy; roots, the place and culture of my ancestors and most immediate relations. I have had the good fortune to visit there on several occasions. First time at the far end of a junior college year spent in Aix-en-Provence, France, perfecting French speaking, 1964. An initial trip at Christmas/New Years took me to my paternal ancestral village, Casandrino. When mom got wind of my trip, she made certain I planned a spring-time return to Italy and the maternal fountainhead of Montefiascone, Tuscany (equal time for her side of the family, I suppose).

In 1965-66, I enrolled in the Università per Stranieri at Perugia where I took a year to earn an Italian Teaching Degree. The next year and a half took me through a Masters Program on French Teaching at Colgate University. Since then I have taught both Italian and French and returned with some regularity to Italy.

—In 1971-72 for a 15-month tour of duty with the US Navy (anchored in Gaeta, Italy, a lovely town midway between Rome and Naples. My ship carried the



The author (Angelojohn Chianese) demonstrates to nephew Anthony Sciscio (Lilia Chianese and Bud's boy) how to turn your life upsidedown.

Chief of Staff Admiral of the Mediterranean 6th Fleet. We got to all the exotic ports—Cannes, Istanbul, Casablanca, Lisbon, Barcelona, Athens, Gibraltar, etc.

—In 1974, as guide and protector of my 81 year old grandma, Assunta, who had not been back "home" for 60 years, a blessed and privileged trip. My generous uncle Joe reimbursed me my air fare...

—In 1980 for a visit and again in 1984 with my wife Bobbi and one year old baby, Julianne.

1984 was my last time there. Then this last summer I was having a walk and talk with Cousin Samarah Bellardo regarding my past experiences with language teaching and music improvisations, and he started planting some seeds of possibility in my over-long composting brain. "You could very effectively combine mu-

sic, rhythm and language in the teaching of foreign languages" I am still mulling that one over. "How about coaching opera singers in French/Italian?" Sounded do-able to me. "What about a three-week Italian class for cultural exchange students in Italy this spring with me and the International Opera Company?"

Needless to say, I am on my way! And I have a dream. A fantasy, it could be called. But, hey, I've had sufficient dreams and prayers transform into reality lately, to trust the process of speaking them to fruition.

My father Tony Chianese has never been to Italy—now he has an inexpensive guide available to accompany him. And how about his sister, Assunta look-alike, Aunt Sue? Nice break from everyday life in Whitehorse, N. J. Last year Willie Bilancio spent an exhilarating three weeks connected to this cultural god-send. Those of you out there, and you know who you are, who have been holding out, holding off and meaning to do this for a long time, let's go! After all, the program director, Samarah. J. Bellardo, is very LaVigna friendly. I could really get into an early pre-LaVigna picnic on the olde sodde. How about you? Get out your last issue of LaVigna and call ★ Dr. Samarah J. Bellardo to find out the hows and whens (Note: the dates for departure and return have shifted, since last publication, to June 1, 2 and 3 departures with return on about June 21). Your guide (me!) is ready if you are.

Lastly, there is one person more than anyone else I would feel privileged to be in Italy with this spring, someone who not only has worked very hard to "keep the faith" of remembering and recalling to us all the importance of our roots, but who has been able to carry this vision without the benefit of ever having been to Italy. I am talking about a man who not only absorbed his father's teaching on the subject of cultural heritage, but put in the long, tedious and often

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uncomfortable months and years of helping to prepare and plant and harvest the garden of his grandpa Joe. This is a man who made sure his elders, aunts, uncles, great aunts and great uncles, were heard, heeded, appreciated and respected. Even when it became deeply painful and difficult, as with our dear late great Uncle Alfonso, Francis Bilancio has been there. And been there. And been there. (But not yet "there" to Italy). He has invested his time, his energy and his not-so-abundant financial resources in people, not things; in ideas, not fads. He has continued a tradition and would not miss the long 12-hour drive back to 90 Eggerts Road from Michigan for the annual family picnic for any amount of goods or money, far as I can tell.

Here we have a personal asset among us of such grand proportion that often tend to overlook the blessing he is in my life and the lives of my children. His mother and father, who were so very generous and gracious to me and my family while they walked the planet, still inspire me through recalled words and songs and moments which dance frequently through my heart and mind. They would be so proud of you Fran, and so grateful for your endeavors. But they are on that very different plane beyond pride and gratitude. So I'll feel it for them since I'm still solid. And tell my friends and family about what I see in their souls.

(Note to Fran Bilancio: I know I asked you a while ago if you would consider going to Italy sometime with me. Well, this is the time. Andiamo, cugino, life is short! Or, as Lorenzo dei Medici said so long ago:

"Quant'e' bella giovinezza
Che si fugge tuttavia;
Chi vuol' esser' lieto, sia!
Di doman' non c'e' certezza!"

"How beautiful is youth
Which is always running off;
Whoever seeks joy, so be it!
Tomorrow makes no promises!"